

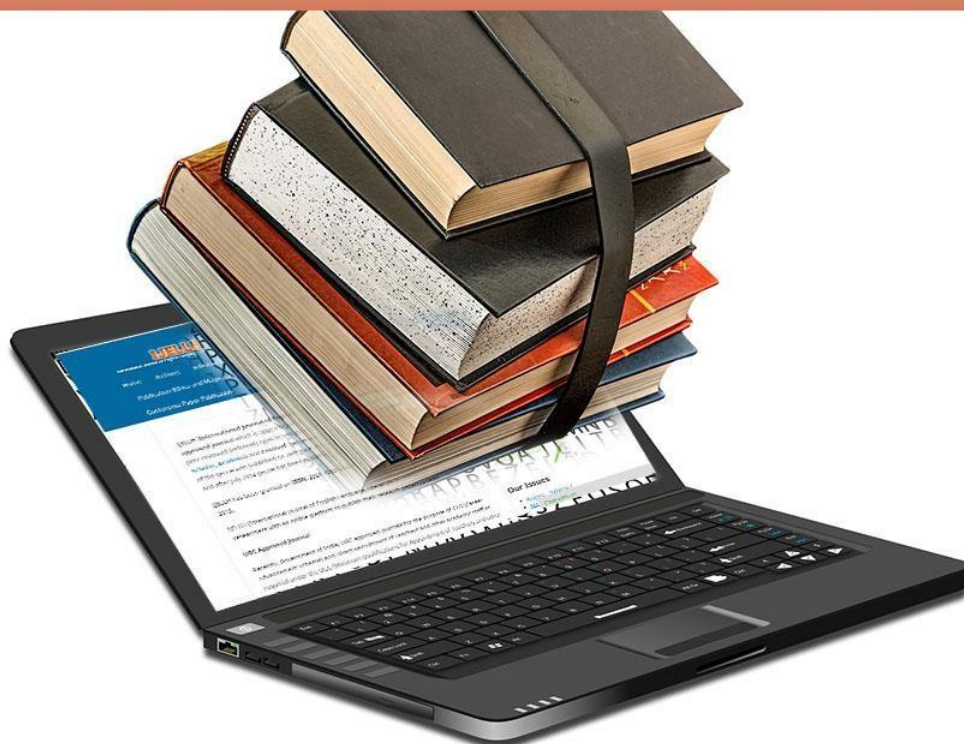
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Analysing Problems Faced by the Indian Rural Students in Learning English as a Second Language

Abstract

English language in India is being treated as the official language because of its immense importance around the globe. Due to its vast presence in the entire world, English has become a common language of communication i.e., lingua franca. Its importance can be seen in every field of life including education, politics, business, law, government, technology, trade and travel; which makes it a language of immense prestige and elite class. It has been observed that the English language has got greater attention in the last few decades for the number of English medium schools have increased rapidly specifically in urban areas. Therefore, students residing in urban areas have easy access to learning English. However, if we talk about rural areas of India, we will find that students lack adequate exposure of the language as there has not been any focus either of the government or the policy makers towards providing English environment to the students.

This paper is the result of an investigation carried out to highlight certain basic factors that create obstacles among rural students in learning English as a second language. The researcher has tried to narrow down these factors as external factors and internal factors. Internal factors deal with an individual's personal issues that create problems in the

adaptation of all the four skills (LSRW) while external factors are those issues which are beyond the personal problems of an individual. This paper lays special emphasis on the external factors responsible for the problems that Indian rural students face in the learning of English language. At the end of this paper possible suggestions are made by the researcher with an intention to help students, teachers and school administrations for the successful rectification of these problems.

Keywords: English as a second language (ESL), Rural students, Lingua franca, LSRW, Internal factors, External factors, Obstacles.

1. Introduction

In India, English language is being treated as the official language because of its immense importance around the globe and the influence of British rule after independence. Due to its vast presence in the entire world, English has become a common language of communication i.e., lingua franca. The importance of English can be seen in every field of life including education, politics, business, law, government, technology, trade and travel, as well as it is considered as the language of the elite. In almost all competitive examinations English language is used as a medium of instruction. It is the language which helps us in creating and developing our relations and trade with the rest of the world. Therefore basic knowledge of English is the need of the hour for each and every one of us.

In India, the 2001 census data (released in late 2009) reports that 10.4% of the population claimed to speak English as a second or third language – that equates to around 126 million speakers in 2010. (Graddol, D 2010)

Nowadays teaching of English in urban areas has been increased tremendously and they have greater access of learning it, but still, the focus in rural areas lack in every aspect,

therefore, students face lots of difficulty in the learning of English. Learning English as a second language requires attentive, conscious and systematic efforts.

Language learning is a skill that can be perfected only through constant practice and continuous exposure to the target language, the available resources should be completely tapped so as to provide an encouraging atmosphere for learning and practising the language. (Gomathi, 2014)

In many countries including India, English is the language which has been taught and used as the medium of instruction along with the native language. In urban areas of India, English has been taught effectively to students as most of the schools are of English medium and they have greater exposure of learning it; while students of rural areas are still incompetent with English. India, being a country with diverse native languages, it has been observed that students belonging to rural areas face a lot of problems in learning English. The hurdles that students encounter during the process of learning can be divided into two significant factors termed as external factors and internal factors. Internal factors deal with an individual's personal issues that create problems in the adaptation of all the four skills (LSRW) such as language transfer i.e. the interference of mother, over generalization and simplification. Some other factors that affect an individual's language learning are attitude, intelligence, motivation and anxiety. While external factors are those issues that are beyond the personal problems of an individual. Some of the major external factors are briefly discussed in this paper after analysing the data. The aim of this study is to identify and explore the obstacles that create problems in the learning of English language. Numerous reasons have been identified that create problems and that need to be improved or eradicated for the betterment of students, society and nation. Moreover, it will also come up with some remedial measures that will help students, teachers and school administrations to overcome these difficulties.

2. Aims of the Study

- To identify and analyse the problems faced by Indian rural students in learning of English at the high school level.
- To suggest appropriate remedial measures for the successful rectification of these problems.

3. Significance of the study

This study mainly highlights external factors that create problems in the learning of English as a second language. The intention is to benefit and guide students, English language teachers, curriculum developers, educational policymakers and various other educational institutions to come out with several beneficial measures for promoting a better quality of education. The study will assist them to overcome these problems. It may also help teachers to develop and produce their own resources (i.e. authentic materials) in addition to textbooks. This study may also benefit other researchers who are interested to carry out a study in the same field.

4. Methodology

The aim of the present study is to identify and analyse the external factors that create problems among students residing in rural areas of India in learning English as a second language. The study was carried out with the rural students from different regions of India who have recently joined Aligarh Muslim University after passing their high school. Sixty students from different schools were selected randomly for data collection. The study is qualitative in nature and interview method has been used for collecting data. Each interview lasted approximately fifteen minutes and all interviews were recorded. Interview questions were based on what problems they encounter in the learning of English as a second language in their schools. Informal questions were also asked in order to make participants relax and

for their better understanding. And later the researcher listened to the recording multiple times and analysed their answers. All students responded voluntarily. Through the data collected, many factors have been identified due to which rural students face difficulties in learning English at the high school level.

Findings

There are several problems that rural students of India face during learning English as a second language. Some basic external factors which were common among most of the participants are mentioned below.

5. Lack of Updated Syllabus

According to participants, there is no syllabus at all in most of the rural schools and where there is available syllabus they do not include all the four skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) of language which is very much necessary for mastery of any language. Syllabus tells us what is to be learnt and why. A good syllabus always gives a total guideline to the teacher as well as to the learner. A planned syllabus is very much necessary for providing the knowledge of the language, which should include communicative activities that are related to all the four skills of English language. It will improve the overall performance of students. Furthermore, books that are used in classrooms are not up to date as well as boring and old, due to which students do not show interest in learning. Without the interest of students learning of any language is impossible.

6. Method of Teaching

Participants acknowledged that the method used in rural areas for teaching English in classrooms is still traditional which is based on the grammar-translation method. This method mainly focuses on the competence of learners (i.e. knowledge of the language) rather than on performance (i.e. actual use of language). Due to rigorous pattern drills, students lack interest

in learning and it creates the learning environment dull. The medium of interaction is the mother tongue of learners where students, as well as teachers both, use their vernacular language during the learning process which creates difficulty in framing sentences in English. Students play a passive role in learning and teachers are considered as a torchbearer. Students simply learn whatever their teacher teaches them without asking any question. Deductive method is used in teaching the rules of English language and, therefore, the active participation of students in classrooms is very less. Modern techniques are not used at all for teaching due to which the learning environment is tedious. Role-play, group discussion, peer-learning, fun activities and games are very rare in classrooms. These activities help to encourage students' interest and motivation towards learning.

7. Lack of Trained Teachers and Proper Guidelines

Another basic problem is the unavailability of skilled and trained teachers which is one of the biggest reasons that create obstacles in the learning of English in rural areas. The role of a teacher is very important in providing knowledge to the students but there are very less expert trained teachers, those who can impart knowledge. Each and every student of rural areas has much capabilities and talents but unfortunately, they lack proper guidance and opportunity to develop their skills. The responsibility of a teacher is to diagnose and identify each student's problems, weaknesses and then try to eliminate their difficulties and develop competence among them. Swami Vivekananda once said, "A true guidance is like a small torch in a dark forest, it does not show everything once. But it gives enough light for the next step to be safe".

8. Most Schools are Run by the Government

Attending class is not compulsory and teachers are also irregular in government schools and this is a common phenomenon. Most teachers do not take active participation in teaching and they do not focus on students individually since they get salary every month

without much effort, therefore, they do not bother much for the education of students. Various facilities such as sitting arrangements, the infrastructure of classrooms, safe drinking water and many other facilities lack in government schools as compared to private schools and these improper and lack of facilities also create obstacles in learning.

9. Students Read English only for Passing Examination

Our examination system does not test students' creative and analytical skills rather it tests only the learning ability of students. English is not taught as skills for dealing with everyday life situations but it is taught only as a subject. Therefore, instead of using basic rules in real life situations, students do rote learning for getting more marks in their respective examinations and after a few days, they forget it. Even students those who score high marks in their examinations are not able to use English frequently and fluently.

10. Large Classrooms

Almost all the schools of rural areas are with large classrooms, where the entire students of a class sit together in a single classroom. The strength of students in classrooms determines the second language learning process because in smaller classes teacher can get to know every student's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers can focus on each and every individual student performance and can guide them in a proper way wherever they need help or face problems in learning. Therefore fewer numbers of students in classes promote better learning of language. Large number of students in a classroom creates difficulty in learning because various classroom activities such as group work, cooperative learning, group discussion and many other communicative activities which form learning environment interesting and interacting are not possible. It is very difficult to involve all the students in activities and exercises in such classrooms.

Role of group activities, According to Niederhauser (1997), English teachers may view pair activities as effective ways to reduce performance anxiety and increase learner's confidence. Students are more comfortable in learning a new language when they know that they have a partner to learn and experience with.

11. Lack of Motivation and Interest

At the earlier stage of students' life, they are not aware of the importance of English in everyday life but when they realise at the later stage then it is too late for them to grasp the basic knowledge of the language, it occurs with most of the rural students. School administration neither motivates nor encourages students towards the learning of English while motivation plays a pivotal role in learning the second language. Students learn more when they are encouraged. Since rural students do not know the importance of English in today's world. Therefore, no interest is shown by them in learning English and the teacher also does not motivate them in learning. Various researches proved that students learn and score more when they are motivated. Nunan (1999 as cited in Juhana, J. 2012) stresses that motivation is important to notice in that it can affect students' reluctance to speak in English. In this sense, motivation is a key consideration in determining the preparedness of learners to communicate. Later Zua (2008) further adds that motivation is inner energy which enhances learner's interest in studies. When students lack motivation towards learning they show no or less interest in learning.

12. Lack of Parents' Education and Income

The quality of education for students is decided by the income and education of the parents because educated parents also educate their children in a better way. Generally, in rural areas families are not economically sound or, if parental occupation and income is good then they provide their children good quality of education by providing them extra tutor at home, as well as they, send their child to convent schools where the quality of education is

quite good as compared to government schools. Educated parents also provide their children with a better learning environment at home.

13. Lack of Atmosphere and Exposure

Environment plays an important role in providing exposure to students to learn English, but unfortunately, students do not find opportunity to speak English because they do not have atmosphere neither at school nor at home. Language learning is affected by the atmosphere from where a student belongs to. Parents are also not much educated in rural areas, due to which students face lack of exposure at every place. In schools, there is no such environment which encourages students to learn English. As Ellis (1997) described the second language acquisition as "the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom".

14. Remedial Measures and Conclusion

Language is a means of communication with the help of which we interact with each other. English acts as a link language in the whole world. The importance of English in India can never be underestimated. Its ignorance may lead us weak towards global competitiveness. As we know that English enjoys the status of a medium of instruction as well as the compulsory subject in India. And it provides us with vast opportunities in every field of life. According to the 2011 census, around 68% population of India still reside in rural areas. In order to make India a developed country, it is necessary to provide a basic knowledge of English in rural areas. There are various factors that create difficulties in the process of learning. Appropriate remedial measures are mentioned below for the successful rectification of these problems.

The syllabus should be updated regularly on the basis of needs of the students as well as on the basis of regularly changing scenario of Indian education. A well-planned syllabus should be used in order to make students more creative and competent. Authentic materials

may be incorporated in syllabus if possible, as it will make students aware of the realistic use of language and encourage them to use English in their real life.

Any language could be mastered through practice but it should include all four skills of language (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing). Schools in the rural area should include all these skills in their syllabus along with equal emphasis which is of very much importance for the overall performance of the students.

Skilled teachers should be recruited as teachers are the main source of knowledge. Teachers are the model from whom students learn. Teachers who are already in service should be given short term training or they may be allowed to attend seminars and workshops in order to gain new ways and methods of teaching English.

The method of teaching should be learner centred instead of teacher centred, where everyone should get a chance to speak and participate in the learning process. Teachers should reduce or remove anxiety level and at the same time, they should develop the confidence level of students because students learn more when they are less anxious and more confident.

Importance of English should be explained in order to motivate students toward learning. They should be encouraged to take active participation in the classrooms by making classes interesting. To overcome the anxiety of students they should be allowed to participate in various oral activities. Classrooms can be more interesting if it includes Skills based activities such as group discussion, role-play, presentations and various other communicative activities.

Basic necessary learning equipment such as quality textbooks and other resources like library facility, language lab, and internet connection should be made easily accessible to students so as to generate interest towards learning and to make learning easy at the same

time. In addition to this, children from economically weaker background should be given adequate scholarship so that they can continue and complete their education.

In order to yield maximum academic output teachers should create an English speaking environment by using English as the medium of instruction in the classrooms. And they should create a friendly bond among students because it makes learning easier. Schools of rural areas should provide a favourable supportive atmosphere for students to use English language.

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